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BETWEEN HUSBAND AND WIFE

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

written collectively by

The Peking People's Art Theatre

SUPPLEMENT TO
CHINA RECONSTRUCTS, No. 6, 1953



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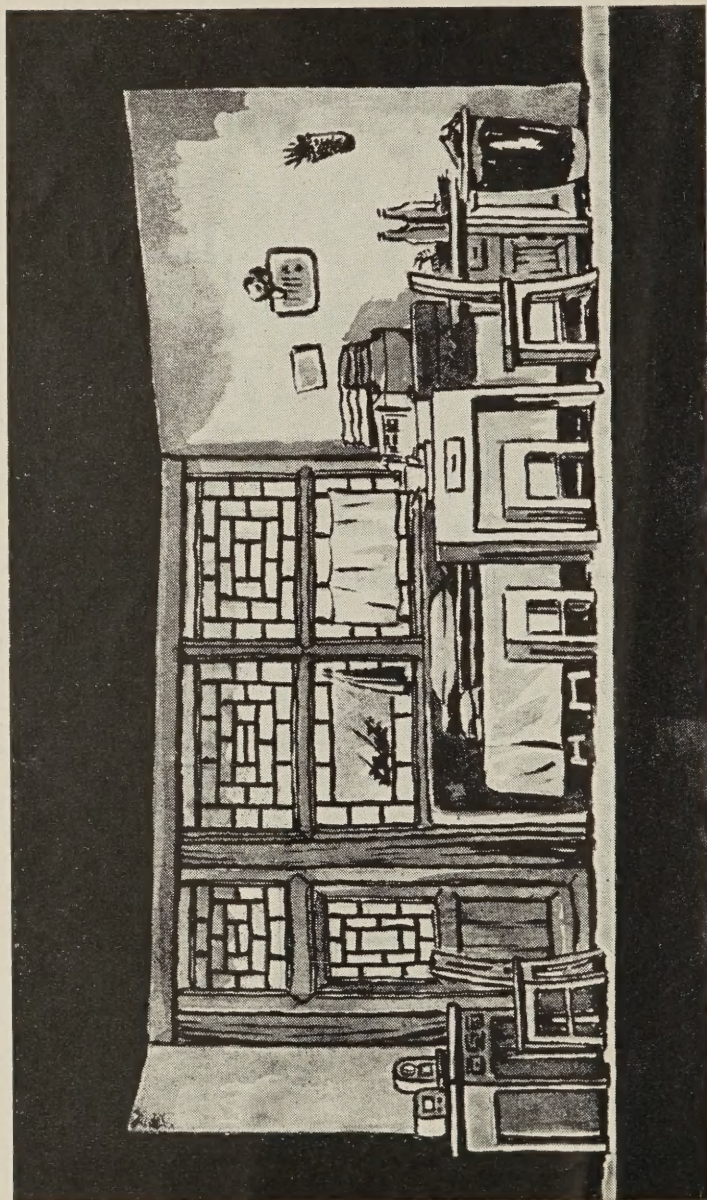
DEC 30 1954

BETWEEN HUSBAND AND WIFE

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The Peking People's Art Theatre

Translated by Sidney Shapiro



How the stage is set.

TIME

Early winter, 1952, on a Sunday morning.

PLACE

The home of Chang, a factory worker in Peking.

CAST

CHANG—a worker, 29 years old.

WIFE —Chang's wife, about 26.

SUN —member of the factory production committee, 25 years old,
Chang's neighbour.

ORCHID—Sun's sister, about 18.

SCENE

The interior of the north wing of a one-storey house built around a square courtyard, typical of Peking. In the rear wall of the stage, left, is a door leading to the courtyard. A large window, made of paper pasted on a wooden trellis frame, occupies the centre of the rear wall. A long wide wooden bed, covered with a spread, stands flush against the rear wall, beneath the window. On the right wall hang some family photographs and Chang's pennant for finishing his quota ahead of schedule. At the foot of the bed against the right wall, upstage, are a trunk, a small chest of drawers, a sewing basket and clothing. Further downstage, against the right wall, is a low cupboard for dishes. Bottles of cooking oil and cooking wine, and various kitchen utensils, stand on top of it. Still further downstage right, next to the cupboard, is a big earthen water vat. On the wall is a small basket for chopsticks. Beside the vat, downstage right, is a door leading to the kitchen. A desk and chair stand beside the left wall. On the desk are a radio, clock, thermos bottle and books. Downstage, centre and to the right, is a square table with a chair and two stools around it.

As the curtain rises, Chang is seated alone beside the table, concentrating on writing an outline for a speech. The baby is sleeping soundly on the bed. Cries of street vendors selling sesame cakes and crullers

and the sound of an oil vendor hitting a stick against a block of wood, the traditional way in which such pedlars announce themselves, can be heard outside.

CHANG: (to himself, excitedly) This should save the country over a billion yuan.

Chang continues to write. His wife enters from the kitchen door, carrying a plate of fried meat dumplings.

WIFE: These were left over last night. I heated them up for you. Come on, have some.

CHANG: (engrossed in writing; absently) All right.

WIFE: (pours Chang a cup of tea and places it in front of him) What are you writing?

CHANG: (inattentively) An outline.

WIFE: (doesn't understand) An outline?

CHANG: It's about that new method I worked out. I'm going to give a report on it.

Chang continues writing.

WIFE: Hurry up and eat. Can't you write just as well when you finish?

CHANG: Leave them here. I'll eat a little later.

Wife doesn't want to disturb him. She goes to the foot of the bed and picks up the clothing Chang took off last night. She puts the clothing in a washbasin and goes out to the courtyard through the rear door.

ORCHID: (offstage) Ho! What a good housewife! Washing clothes so early in the morning!

WIFE: (offstage) He changed them last night. I thought I'd get at them while I had the chance. Orchid, tie up the line at your end, will you?

ORCHID: (offstage) All right.

WIFE: (offstage) Where are you going?

ORCHID: (offstage) To the Housewives' Homework Team.

WIFE: (offstage) Are you going to fetch some work? Bring some for me too!

ORCHID: (offstage) The way I reckoned it, it's Sunday—you want to be with Brother Chang!

WIFE: (offstage) You!

ORCHID: (*giggling*) Let me get you a bucket of water.

WIFE: I'll go myself.

CHANG: *Chang Writes on. Baby begins to cry. Wife! Wife! (there is no answer. Chang picks up the baby: croons) Oh! Baby's awake. Don't cry, don't cry. Papa will hold you. Ah, ah, ah!*

Chang sits down at the table, with the baby in one arm. Tries to write. Baby cries again.

CHANG: Wife! Wife!

WIFE: (*offstage*) Coming! I'm coming!

Enter Wife.

CHANG: Where've you been? You don't even bother about the baby!

Wife takes the child: soothes it. The cry of a vegetable seller is heard outside.

WIFE: Go out and buy some vegetables, will you?

CHANG: Can't you see I'm busy?

WIFE: But I've got my hands full!

CHANG: He's not crying any more. Just leave him on the bed. He'll be all right.

Wife puts down the child, takes up the shopping basket.

WIFE: Look after him now!

Exit Wife. After a brief interval, Sun enters.

SUN: How is it coming? Are you ready?

CHANG: Sun, hello! I'm practically finished. See—I've got it nearly all written out. I won't forget what I want to say now when I have to get up and talk. Then, when I show them the new design and explain it, they'll understand it even better, it'll be even clearer.

SUN: Right. This meeting today is very important. If your method is introduced all over, it'll have a big effect on our production. And don't forget to tell everyone how you solved the tough knots.

CHANG: Do I have to write that too?

SUN: Of course you do. Don't you remember? When you started working on it, there were people who said our machines are old, they're losing their teeth, they can't stand up. But you stuck it out.

You experimented seven times, until you finally hit it right. Getting that fact across will set the men hot on the trail of new methods.

CHANG: All the workers want to figure out new ways of producing.

SUN: Sure they do.

CHANG: Who's going to the meeting today?

SUN: The director of the factory, the chief secretary of the factory's Communist party branch, the chairman of our trade union, the chief secretary of the factory's Youth League branch...Lots of people!

CHANG: Oh, as many as that? (*joking*) I never made a speech on a platform before. You're a member of the production committee too. If I get stuck, you'll have to speak for me.

SUN: Not a chance!

CHANG: Come on, sit down. Have a cigarette.

Sun walks over to the table and sees the meat dumplings.

SUN: Well! Yesterday it was noodles, and today it's meat dumplings!

CHANG: Sit down, Sun. Try a couple.

SUN: (*eating one*) Mm! They taste good. You're really lucky. Sister Chang takes care of you all right—you don't have to bother about a thing. Feeds you dumplings first thing in the morning. You're certainly in clover.

CHANG: What's so special? She just does the same as anyone else's wife.

SUN: You shouldn't say that. My sister praises her all the time. If your wife didn't take such good care of the house, how could you keep your whole mind on your job?

CHANG: (*lightly*) Huh! To hear you talk, if it weren't for her, I couldn't do any work. Your sister Orchid is always sticking up for her. They're two of a kind.

SUN: There you go again! It's getting late. I'd better go and arrange things first. You come a little earlier too. We start at eight-thirty sharp and we've only got an hour and a half. At ten o'clock the Sino-Soviet Friendship Association is putting on a movie for us. Don't hold us up.

CHANG: I'll be on time all right! I'll come just as soon as I finish writing this thing.

SUN: I'm going.

Wife enters with the shopping basket full of meat and vegetables: meets Sun at the rear door.

WIFE: Why, Sun! Won't you stay a while?

SUN: I've got something to do at the factory. (*sees the contents of the basket.*) Meat again today!

WIFE: Today's Sunday, isn't it? I want to make him something good. (*she points to Chang.*) Come back and eat with us later.

SUN: All right.

Exit Sun.

WIFE: (*puts down the basket and approaches the table*) Just look! The dumplings are all cold. Are you going to eat them or not!

Chang makes no reply.

WIFE: Shall I heat them up for you?

CHANG: I don't want any. Heat them up and eat them yourself!

WIFE: I've eaten already...(*after a pause*)...We housewives are going to hold a meeting today to pick a Public Health Work Model.

CHANG: (*rather impatient*) Hm!

WIFE: We've got the list of candidates all worked out...

CHANG: Don't bother me. Can't you see how busy I am?

WIFE: Busy, again busy. And when you're busy I can't get a good word out of you!

She clears the dishes from the table and goes into the kitchen. Chang finishes writing, is ready to go, but cannot find his design drawing.

CHANG: Mm. Where's that drawing?

Chang searches for the drawing. Enter Wife.

WIFE: What are you looking for?

Chang ignores her.

WIFE: Tell me. What are you trying to find?

CHANG: You don't know. Even if I tell you, you won't understand.

He continues to search.

WIFE: You! What in the world are you looking for?

CHANG: Maybe I left it in the factory. (*he puts on his jacket.*)

WIFE: Where are you going?

CHANG: To the factory.

WIFE: It's Sunday. What are you going to do there today?

CHANG: I've got business.

Wife wants to stop him, but he is already gone. Wife folds up the sheets of scrap paper which Chang has left on the table, and puts them under the radio on the desk.

ORCHID: *(offstage)*. Sister, Sister! *(she enters through rear door)* Sister! *(Wife waves her hand to indicate—don't wake the baby)* I've brought some work for you and here's the money for that embroidery you did. *(she gives a bundle and money to Wife)* Sister, this time you ought to use it to make some new clothes for yourself.

WIFE: No. I've been planning for this. I'm going to buy Chang a scarf.

ORCHID: You are the limit! You think only of Brother Chang. Did you finish making the cotton padded jacket with the cloth you bought him the other day? I'll help you, if you've got no time.

WIFE: You don't have to. I finished it long ago.

ORCHID: Oh, so quick! When did you find time to do it?

WIFE: Chang's been busy at the factory lately. He comes home late. I worked on it while I waited up for him. The weather's turning cold, and he works so hard. I can't have him catching cold, can I?

ORCHID: You see! Didn't I say you only think of him! *(suddenly remembers)* Oh!

Orchid takes a slip of paper out of her pocket.

WIFE: What is it?

ORCHID: The Housewives' Homework Team leader sent this to you.

WIFE: What does it say?

ORCHID: It's all written down, isn't it?

WIFE: Read it to me.

ORCHID: It's not written to me. I'm not going to read it!

WIFE: Oh you scamp! Are you trying to force me to read?

ORCHID: *(hands her the slip)* That's exactly what I'm doing. Read it yourself!

Wife accepts the slip reluctantly, glances at it, stuffs it in her pocket.

ORCHID: *(seizing Wife's hand.)* What are you doing?

WIFE: I'll read it later.

ORCHID: What's the use of your learning how to read? I'm going to make you read today!

WIFE: Really now! I'm sure I can't do it!

ORCHID: You don't think I'd laugh at you, do you?

WIFE: All right. I'll try. But if I can't read it, you've got to help me.

ORCHID: You know I will.

WIFE: *(reads)* "Two sets of embroidered...embroidered..." What's this word?

ORCHID: "Pillow..."

WIFE: "Pillow...two sets of embroidered pillow...pillow..."*(She guesses, and reads it aloud: at the same moment Orchid prompts her)* "cases"...

ORCHID: *(delighted)* Sister—

WIFE: Don't interrupt. Look—*(She continues to read.)* "...Earnings—twenty-two thousand yuan" *(slight pause)* "...exactly."

ORCHID: There. You read the whole thing, didn't you? Not bad at all. And how many days have you been going to school?

WIFE: What do you mean—not bad? After nearly three months of school, all I can read is such a few measly characters! The others are much better than me. I have to take the baby with me to class. First he cries, then he raises a row. I'm always afraid he's disturbing the others—it's really a mess. And I'm stupid too. I can't remember. The minute I put my textbook down to do some housework, I forget all the characters I just studied. Orchid, they want to change us into a high speed class, to learn over a hundred characters a day. I'm afraid I can't keep up.

ORCHID: Why not? You've only got one small fault—always thinking you're not any good at anything. Actually, you're not stupid at all, and you study hard. As long as you don't give up, you're sure to be all right. What are you afraid of? Suppose the baby is a little trouble. I heard that the housewives are going to set up a cooperative day-nursery soon. Then your baby problem will be solved.

WIFE: But that won't be for some time yet. What am I going to do now?

ORCHID: Now you've got Brother Chang. He doesn't have things to do every night of the week. Let him watch the baby for you when he's not busy. If he's really busy, my mother can take over.

Wife sighs.

ORCHID: What's the matter, Sister?

WIFE: Nothing.

ORCHID: Really now, what's wrong?

WIFE: Ah, you don't know. Even when he's not busy, he doesn't help me with the baby. Don't talk about looking after the baby—last time I asked him to buy me a notebook, and he didn't even do that. Finally, I had to buy it myself. He's always saying that I don't study, that I'm uneducated. But when I really do study, he doesn't give me the least bit of help. If it wasn't for you and your Ma always helping me out, I wouldn't even recognize the few characters I know. He doesn't care anything about my troubles; he doesn't care anything about family matters. And when I ask him about the factory, he only grunts, says I don't understand, tells me not to bother about such things. He just thinks I'm backward! Orchid, tell me the truth—am I really backward?

ORCHID: What right has he to say you're backward? Why, in the Public Health Drive, our team was the best. Everybody in our team says you're a fine leader; other teams praise you too! When we pick a Public Health Work Model today, I think you've got a chance of being elected! Sister, don't listen to him. Keep up the good work, and let him see for himself.

WIFE: Yes. Before, I stayed at home all the time. I didn't study. I really didn't understand anything then. Now I'm not like that. I've got some ideas on public health work. I used to be afraid to open my mouth at a meeting; now I can lead a group discussion. When I listen to a report, it makes sense to me. I feel myself that I've learned a lot. On the way home, I always think of talking to him about these things. But when I get into the house, I can't get him to listen. He's simply not interested in me.

ORCHID: Brother Chang is wrong. He still looks at you in the old way. But women are different today. They drive trams, cars, railway engines, even planes and tanks have women drivers. We women are just as good as men in every way. It seems to me that Brother Chang has got to straighten out his old-fashioned ideas. Sister, you ought to have a good talk with him.

WIFE: Right! Things can't go on like this. I've got to talk to him. *(the clock strikes nine.)* Oh, it's time. I have to check the public health work. I nearly forgot. My brain's been fuzzy all morning. *(she walks over to the bed and looks at the sleeping baby.)* You see, it's Sunday, but he's not home today either. Will you watch the baby for me?

ORCHID: Sure. I'll take him over to my place. Don't be late for your meeting!

WIFE: I won't. Take a couple of diapers along. They're drying beside the kitchen stove.

Exit Wife: Orchid goes into the kitchen for diapers. Chang enters hastily, rummages through the desk drawers and tosses things about.

ORCHID: *(returning from the kitchen)* Oh, you've come back, Brother Chang.

CHANG: I've got to look for something.

ORCHID: *(playfully)* Is it Sister Chang?

CHANG: Don't fool around. I'm busy.

ORCHID: *(picks up the child)* Brother Chang, can I take the baby out?

CHANG: Don't bother me. *(he rushes about the room, searching, up-setting everything, shouts toward the kitchen)* Wife! Wife! Now where's she gone to! *(Orchid exits to the courtyard.)* That woman is impossible! *(calls towards courtyard door)* Wife! Wife!

ORCHID: *(from the courtyard, offstage)* Sister's gone to do her public health work. What do you want her for?

CHANG: I've got to see her.

ORCHID: *(offstage)* What for?

CHANG: Something important. Please, call her for me!

ORCHID: *(offstage)* All right. I'll go and get her.

CHANG: *(talking to himself)* Public health work! She makes such a mess of the house, what kind of work can she do!...Still not back! *(he paces up and down, looks at the clock)* I'm late already!

Enter Wife

WIFE: What's the important thing you want to see me about? I'm just in the middle of something!

CHANG: Where's my design drawing?

WIFE: Design drawing?

CHANG: Where did you put it?

WIFE: What?

CHANG: The drawing! The drawing!

WIFE: Where did you leave it?

CHANG: I'm asking you!

WIFE: You'd better tell me clearly then.

CHANG: It's that sheet of...bah! I'll tell you and you won't be clear! Design drawing, a design, drawn on a sheet of paper! I need it for my report.

WIFE: Oh, that! I put it over here for you.

CHANG: Quick! Quick! It's time to start already!

Wife takes a drawing from under the radio and hands it to Chang.

CHANG: I've seen that one. That's not it.

WIFE: Which one is it then? Try to think carefully where you left it.

CHANG: If I knew where I left it, would I be asking you?

WIFE: *(helplessly)* Then you look for it! *(both of them search all over the room)* What paper can he mean?

ORCHID: *(offstage)* Sister, we're going to start the meeting. They're waiting for you!

WIFE: I'll be there in a minute!

CHANG: How can you go skipping off to a meeting? I still haven't found my drawing!

WIFE: Then you've got to tell me plainly. Otherwise, how can I help you?

CHANG: Ai! What a dunce! *(he forces himself to be patient)* It's a sheet of paper with a picture of a frame. On the side are two blades. *(he gesticulates with his hands as he talks)*

WIFE: Oh, you mean that one! *(she takes a sheet of paper from her study notebook)* Is this it?

CHANG: What are you fooling around with my papers for?

WIFE: Who's fooling around? I took it out of the pocket of your clothes before I washed them!

CHANG: Why did you put it in a silly place like that?

WIFE: Silly place? That's my study notebook. I put it there because I was afraid I'd lose it. You wouldn't tell me clearly. How did

I know what you were looking for? See what a mess you've made of the house!

SUN: (*calls from offstage*) Chang! Chang! (*Sun enters through the courtyard door.*) Chang!

CHANG: Sun, I've found it! Am I too late? Let's hurry!

SUN: The meeting's off!

CHANG: Off?

SUN: When you went back to look for your drawing, the Ministry of Industry phoned the factory director and called him to a conference. Just before he left, the director said our meeting was very important; he wants to attend it in person. Anyhow there wasn't enough time, so we put it off. After we fix the new date, I'll come and let you know.

CHANG: It's all because of this mess.

SUN: What are you worried about? With more time, you can prepare much better.

Chang doesn't answer, feels let down.

SUN: It's all right, Chang, old man. It'll be just the same if we hold the meeting some other time. As a matter of fact we didn't allow enough time for today's meeting. I have to go over to the union. We're going to show a movie there soon. You ought to go and see it.

CHANG: No! I'm not going!

SUN: All right then, don't let this thing get you down. See you later.

Exit Sun.

CHANG: (*flings his speech outline on the table: turns to wife*) This is all your fault!

WIFE: My fault? How is it my fault?

CHANG: You've got nothing better to do than go around grabbing my things. Such an important drawing, putting it in a silly place like that. How did you expect me to find it?

WIFE: I kept asking you what you were looking for, but you wouldn't make a sound.

CHANG: Oh, I'm supposed to tell you everything, am I?

WIFE: You wouldn't tell me. Then you blamed me because you couldn't find it. What do you want me to do?

CHANG: Women! They should keep their hands off things they don't know anything about.

WIFE: Again you blame me for not knowing. When did you ever tell me anything? When you come home, if you're not eating, you're sleeping. Or you get busy on something and never open your mouth. What's going on in the factory, things happening on the outside—you never say anything about them. You keep me completely out of your business. Besides cooking, taking care of the baby and studying, I've got my public health work to do. I'm busy as anything all day long. Then when you show up, I have to take your bad temper too!

CHANG: What do you do that's different from any other housewife? If I told you what a lathe was, or a lead screw, would you understand? Telling you about my business is no use. And that public health work of yours—they can get along just as well without you.

WIFE: You've got no use for me that's all! You think I don't understand anything, that there's nothing I can do well. How can you think I'm so worthless? I can do some work outside the house now, I understand a little of the new ideas. How is it that whenever I come home I seem to shrink to half my size? Why do I suddenly become good for nothing?

CHANG: What are you good for? Do you buy the flour? Do you earn the wages?

WIFE: That's right. I'm no good at all. Only you're the smart one! I suppose you look after the house? You take care of the baby? You do the cooking? You wash the clothes?

CHANG: You call that work? Anybody can do that!

WIFE: Fine! You can do everything! I'll turn the whole house over to you and I'll go out and get a job. You'll see whether I can get along! Chairman Mao liberated you; well, he liberated me too. You serve the people; so do I. What right have you got to look down on me?

CHANG: So you're in the right, eh? I don't need you to give me a political lesson.

WIFE: I'm not giving you a political lesson. You just think it over. Is what I'm saying right or not?

CHANG: Have you finished?

WIFE: No, I haven't. Aren't you going to let me talk? I never have a chance to say a word at home. Under the people's government everyone has a right to speak. I'll have my say today, see what you can do to stop me....

Enter Orchid.

ORCHID: Sister, the baby's asleep. (*Wife takes the child from her and puts him on the bed.*) It's time for us to go.

WIFE: Good!

CHANG: Where are you going?

ORCHID: We're having a meeting to pick Public Health Work Models.

CHANG: (*scornfully*) You're going just like that? Who'll take care of the baby?

WIFE: You've got nothing to do now. Why can't you look after him?

CHANG: Oh, so you're turning the baby over to me? I suppose tomorrow you'll want me to do the washing and the cooking too? I think this liberation of women business has gone too far! Take the baby to the meeting with you!

WIFE: He's asleep. How can I take him out?

CHANG: If you won't look after him, better give him away to someone!

WIFE: How can you be so unreasonable? All the years we've been married! I've done my best. Everything I do, I do for you. When did you ever hear me say "no" to anything you wanted me to do? But what about you? When do you ever think of me? When did you ever do anything for me? I'm not going out to play and you have nothing to do. Why can't you keep an eye on the baby for a while?

Chang ignores her.

WIFE: Anyhow, I'm not taking him to the meeting. Watch him or not—that's up to you!

ORCHID: Sister, come on. Let's go!

Exit Wife.

CHANG: Where are you going? Come back here!

Chang starts to follow. Orchid bars his way.

ORCHID: Brother, you really are unreasonable: The baby doesn't belong only to Sister. You're not busy now. Why not look after him a bit?

CHANG: Orchid, you don't understand the situation. You don't know our family. Don't butt in!

ORCHID: Who says I don't understand? What more do you want Sister to do for you? She runs the house beautifully. She never

bothers you with anything. When you come home from work, hot water, hot food—everything's ready for you. Food, clothing—she always thinks of you first. She's busy from morning to night—putting away this, picking up that. And she takes part in study and housewives' homework besides. She sees to it that you never lack a thing. And you? You never give her a second's thought!

CHANG: Orchid, you only know how good she is. But when was I ever bad to her? I've done more than what's right! Do I beat her, or curse at her? Every month, I bring her all my wages. She has all the food and clothing she needs. What else am I supposed to do? Still she's not satisfied. Why doesn't she think of the kind of life women had before?

ORCHID: You! Talking to you is hopeless: I'm going to my meeting! *(she walks to the door, turns and says angrily.)* You—you despise women! You're just feudal!

Exit Orchid.

These words stab Chang. He becomes wrapped in thought.

SUN: *(oŕstage)* Chang! Chang! *(there is no answer: Sun enters)* Hey, Chang, I've got something to tell you. The union—*(he breaks off at the sight of Chang's dejected appearance)* What's wrong? *(Chang does not answer)* What's the matter?

CHANG: Nothing!

SUN: Come on, what is it?...*(pause)*...Are you feeling bad because we didn't hold our meeting?

CHANG: It's not that.

SUN: Well, what is it then? Speak up, speak up! *(Chang doesn't answer)* Come on, have a cigarette! *(Chang still doesn't reply)* What! You want me to light it for you too?

CHANG: *(laughs in spite of himself at this teasing)* Sun, sit down. Sun, I can't figure it out. Would you say I'm feudal?

SUN: What are you talking about? Come to the point!

CHANG: Sun, you know all about my family—how she is to me, how I am to her. This morning she suddenly says I never tell her anything, says I don't think about her! What do you say—am I supposed to tell her all about what goes on at the factory? Telling her is no use! Just now she went out to a meeting. She shoves the child on to me and says I've got to look after him whether I like it or not. Is this what we mean by liberation of women? If that's the way things stand, why, then, I just can't go on like this!

SUN: Why can't you? She treats you fine, and you still complain. What kind of woman do you want anyhow? A meek thing that never talks back? A dummy that never has an idea of her own?

CHANG: I never said that's what I want! But now that women are liberated, they shouldn't overdo it either!

SUN: How do you think they ought to act?

CHANG: The way I see it, liberation of women means that they're not oppressed any more. Well, I don't oppress her. I don't beat her; I don't curse her. All I ask is that she doesn't hold me back. When she goes out to her sanitation work or to her study, I don't stop her. But she ought to be attending to business at home more, instead of never being satisfied. I suppose I should take care of the house while she goes out and works? She wouldn't be any good at it!

SUN: And would you be any good at taking care of the house?

CHANG: (*mumbles*) Well, I...'

SUN: Come on now, Chang. Of course you wouldn't. What do you do for your family anyway? You say she shoved something on to you? Let's hear about it. I'm listening!

CHANG: She just turned the baby over to me!

SUN: Gave the baby to you. And where did she go?

CHANG: To a meeting.

SUN: What are you busy with?

CHANG: I'm busy all week. Shouldn't I get some rest when Sunday comes around?

SUN: That's just it. You've got nothing to do; you get Sunday off! Sister's busy morning, noon and night. And speaking of Sunday—you can go and see a moving picture. And Sister? Isn't she working at home just the same? Today she had to go out to a meeting. I think it's only right for you to look after the baby.

CHANG: To tell you the truth, Sun, I don't mind watching the baby. I'm only afraid if I give her an opening like this, it may spoil her into expecting it all the time. If the neighbours found out, they'd say I pamper my wife. They'd say I'm scared of her. I'd lose face!

SUN: Oh? Giving your wife a little help means you pamper her? That you're afraid of her? Anyone who talks like that has something wrong with his thinking! Why doesn't anybody laugh when a wife helps a husband? Is it because they think it's all right for her to be afraid of him? That's a feudal idea! What's the matter with a husband

helping his wife? You know how to help people. The apprentices in the factory all say you're a fine teacher. They say you're very patient, that you help them with their literacy study too. They've only been in the factory a little over a year and they can operate ■ lathe, and read and write...

CHANG: That's factory work. Of course I have to help them. But this stuff she does around the house...

SUN: Don't turn your nose up at what she does around the house. Without her, you'd really be in a bad way! If Sister didn't run the house so well for you, would you be able to work without a care on your mind? During the production emulation campaign when you worked nights, wasn't it Sister who always brought you hot tea and muffins that made everybody's mouth water? You're forgetting that she has a share in your work. Do you mean to say she doesn't deserve part of the credit for your figuring out a new method? So you ought to help her a little too.

CHANG: You keep saying I don't help her. You don't know how stupid she is! She's a dead-brain, doesn't know a thing about the world. If you tell her anything, she starts asking all kinds of questions. I don't have that much time.

SUN: You're wrong again! When you first started to teach the apprentices, if you said they didn't understand, that they were stupid, if you were so impatient, how could they have learned to read or to run the machines? Isn't it perfectly plain? It's the same with Sister!

CHANG: (*meditates for a moment*) Right! That's the trouble! I haven't been giving her enough leadership!

SUN: That's not what I said. I'm saying that husband and wife have to help each other, not that anyone has to lead anyone else!

Chang is silent.

SUN: You still don't understand? Aiya, old brother, you're making it hard! I've talked myself dry:

CHANG: All right, sit down. I'll get you some water.

Chang fills a cup for Sun, and one for himself.

SUN: There's another question I want to talk to you about.

CHANG: All right, all right. I'm beginning to get the idea. Let's not talk about it any more today.

SUN: How do you know what I'm going to say? I've got good news!

CHANG: Don't fool around.

SUN: Who's fooling? This will make you happy! The factory has decided to send you to the technical training class!

CHANG: Really?

SUN: True enough!

CHANG: Why didn't you say so before?

SUN: If you saw your face when I came in! You looked so put out—how could I talk to you? It was a long time before you let me get it out.

CHANG: *(laughs)* Tell me, how did it happen? Give me the whole story!

SUN: There are only two people going from our entire factory. Getting a chance like this isn't easy!

CHANG: Who's the other one?

SUN: Li from the fitters' department. Because you're both hard workers and you've worked out new methods, it was decided to let you two go. But you can't waste this chance. You've got to bring us back something new.

CHANG: Don't worry. I'll make the most of it all right. But what about our team? And there's our technical discussion meeting, my report?...

SUN: You can rest easy about the team. Our union will work something out. The technical discussion meeting can be arranged too. We can hold it some Sunday when you're off. You don't have to worry about the factory. While you've got the time, you'd better straighten things out at home. You're leaving tomorrow.

CHANG: Tomorrow?

SUN: That's right. This afternoon, you go down to the union for a little chat. You report tomorrow at ten.

CHANG: That's great! *(Chang recalls the quarrel with his wife)* Why did we have to have a row today?

SUN: You can only blame yourself for that.

Enter Orchid and Wife.

ORCHID: You're here too, brother.

WIFE: Hello, Sun.

SUN: What kind of meeting did you hold today?

ORCHID: We were electing a model!

SUN: How did it go?

ORCHID: Pretty well. But Sister wasn't elected.

SUN: It doesn't matter. She'll work harder next time.

CHANG (*mumbles*) It's not so easy to get to be a model!

ORCHID: That's right. It certainly isn't easy! And Sister doesn't understand anything, she's stupid, she's illiterate, she's backward. How could she be picked for a model?

SUN: Orchid, are you at it again?

ORCHID: When you come right down to it, what can Sister do anyway?

SUN: Don't talk like that. If she's chosen next time, won't that be just as good?

ORCHID: Brother Chang, I ask you—if Sister is elected model next time, what will you do?

CHANG: If she's really elected next time,...I'll take my hat off to her!

ORCHID: You don't have to wait till next time. You can start admiring her right now!

Orchid pulls out a red banner inscribed "Public Health Work Model" and holds it up for Chang and Sun to see.

SUN: Well, Chang, what do you say now! (*to Wife*) Congratulations!

ORCHID: Are you convinced, Brother Chang?

CHANG: (*delighted*) I would never have believed it!

ORCHID: There are too many things you would never have believed! Sister isn't the same person she was before. You shouldn't be looking at her in the old way. She can read three or four hundred characters; now she's on the Housewives' Home Work team, too, and doing a fine job. What business have you to say she's backward?

CHANG: You know that many characters? When did you join the Homework team? Why don't I know these things?

WIFE: Didn't I tell you?

CHANG: I... I suppose I didn't listen.

ORCHID: Didn't listen. That's the trouble with you. You never listen to what Sister tells you.

CHANG: All right, I was wrong. Does that suit you?



Orchid shows the "Public Health Model" banner. (Right to left: Sun, Orchid, Chang and Wife.)

SUN: That's the way. If you make a mistake, then admit it. That's the only way to be a true member of the working class!

ORCHID: Sister, face Brother Chang. (*turns to Chang*) Brother Chang aren't you going to apologize to her?

WIFE: Orchid, you are the limit!

SUN: I've got some more good news for you!

ORCHID: What is it?

SUN: Chang here is being sent to the technical training class!

WIFE: No! That's really good news! (*to Chang*) When are you leaving?

CHANG: Tomorrow.

WIFE: (*to Sun*) Tomorrow? Will he have to live there?

SUN: Ask him!

CHANG: Yes, I will have to live there. I have to report there tomorrow morning at ten.

WIFE: Oh. It's a good thing I finished that padded jacket.

ORCHID: Show it to him, Sister. Let him try it on.

Wife brings the jacket and hands it to Chang.

WIFE: Put it on and see if it fits.

ORCHID: Sister never does a bad job.

SUN: My, that is a good job! Have you got any complaints about the way Sister does things this time?

CHANG: (*puts on the jacket*) Fits like a glove. How did you finish it so fast?

WIFE: I do most of my work when you aren't here. Go and study hard. Become a model student. I'll take care of the house. You don't need to worry about anything!

CHANG: But you've got so much to do at home. Won't it hold up your studying?

WIFE: It doesn't matter. I get tired, but what of it? I'm even joining the high speed literacy class. It's going to start soon.

ORCHID: Brother Chang, you can rest easy about things at home. We'll help Sister. Just don't look down on her any more, and everything will be fine.

CHANG: Really, I hope you'll give her a hand once in a while after I leave.

SUN: Of course we will.

CHANG: And after I come back, I definitely....

SUN: (*adds*)—will give her lots of help!

They all laugh.

CHANG: (*suddenly remembers*) That notebook you asked me to buy last time—I kept forgetting about it. (*he takes a new notebook from his pocket.*) This is a prize the factory gave me for finishing my quota ahead of time. You use it. I hope you'll become a model student too!

WIFE: But you're going to class. You'll need it!

CHANG: Take it.

SUN: Now this is what we call "both sides in perfect harmony!" Chang, from the look of things, by tomorrow you two will be a model couple! Let's celebrate in style today. We have to congratulate Sister on being elected a model, and give old Chang a good send-off! I'll go and buy some meat.

WIFE: You don't have to. The meat and vegetables are all bought.

SUN: Then the wine's my treat. (*he takes an empty bottle from the cupboard*)

CHANG: I'll go! I'll go!

ORCHID: Let him go, Brother Chang. (*Exit Sun...Orchid calls after him.*) Wait for me!

WIFE: You come back soon, Orchid.

ORCHID: I won't be long.

Exit Orchid. Chang and Wife look at each other for some time silently.

CHANG: Let's start the cooking!

WIFE: I'll do it. You take a rest.

Chang watches her preparing the vegetables. He wants to do something. Picks up the broom and sweeps the floor.

WIFE: (*Wife cleans the table: Picks up the design drawing*) What do you want to do with this?

CHANG: Put it in the drawer for me, will you? (*the baby starts to cry: Chang runs to the bed*) Ah, you're awake! Papa will hold you! (*he takes up the child in his arms*)

WIFE: (*walks over to Chang*) Give him to me.

CHANG: No, I've got nothing to do now. I'll hold him a while. (*he croons to the baby*)

CURTAIN

HINTS ON ACTING

The noted Chinese dramatist Tsao Yu, in his review of "Between Husband and Wife" printed in *China Reconstructs*, No. 6, 1953, has the following advice for anyone who may wish to stage this play:

The actor who plays Chang Teh-shan should be careful not to put all the emphasis on the backward aspect of his outlook—his habit of looking down on women. This should be regarded only as a flaw in an otherwise positive character. Chang is a worker, one of the masters of the new China. He is a progressive figure, loving life, confident of the future for which he works without thought of self.

Similarly with Chang's wife. She should not be portrayed even at the start, as an old-fashioned, timid woman, governed in every action by the expression on her husband's face. The scene is set after the liberation. The women of China have won freedom and happiness. Their position has been raised. Many among them are learning productive skills and have become specialists in various fields. Although Mrs. Chang remains a housewife, she too has become politically conscious and demands a life of her own. She is modest but does not feel in the least inferior. On the contrary, she is determined to advance. The reason why she always thinks of her husband's comfort is that she loves him and his work of building up the country.

夫妻之間